

-SYLVIA-

Mr. Trent cuts me a cheque for \$500. I studded out a Newfoundland tonight. He leaves talking to his dog.

Dave and Arthur must be lovers. I'm sure they're out together.

No. He can't be. It'd be a crime. A sin. Arthur can't be gay. It's not true.

Dave; maybe. I couldn't care less. Not Arthur.

Gay guys suck. Ok, it'd be totally hot if Arthur hooked up with another guy, but only in fantasy.

It's almost midnight, I did my homework while on the job, I still have to take care of mom, and I just want this day to be over already. The worst part is Mitch and Cliff. The two old fashion lover-boys cornered me, and walked me to an empty hall. Before I could go and they grilled me for information. They pretty much have my scheme figured out. It was my ring tone.

Seven nation army. Fuck.

"Why is it that we heard your phone in the locker room last week?" Mitch growled at me.

"What are you talking about?" I asked

Nobody listens to the White Stripes any more.

"How did your phone get into that locker room?" Cliff said more softly.

"Guys, I seriously don't know what you mean."

"You know exactly what we're on to, Sylvia."

I push Cliff.

"Back off, you dick."

"You just tell us the truth. Don't mess with me."

"Fuck off! I have work, and I've got to go right now."

I blew past them, huffing strongly.

"What if we tell the principal that you were sneaking around in the boys locker room?" Cliff

said snidely.

I turned around and spoke quietly and directly.

“How about the whole world that you sucked his cock?”

I turned and left without even giving a damn for their reaction. Walking out felt more like winter than fall. The sun was disappearing across the horizon and stars had begun their spying. From there I left for the kennel and got the two enormous dogs to get it on. The money I make here should cover the water bill for next month. The pedigreeing industry is rough as hell. So many people focusing on breeds. Sometimes it gets so hard to cheat. Like the rapper said: Pimpin' ain't easy.

On my way to catch the train to work there was a black girl standing under a street light, lighting up a cigarette, and I quickly pulled out my camera. Snap. Beautiful. The angle and the light was just right. Lucky shot.

So I did my normal job, then afterwards in walks Mr. Trent with his dog, who I take into the kennel to get fucked. I xeroxed the pedigree, and got everything wrapped up in less than thirty minutes.

No sooner does Mr. Trent and his bitch leave than my phone rings. It's still the white stripes. I angrily growl when I hear it. Mother or Loopy. I don't know which. I don't want to talk to either of them. I just want to walk to my train stop.

I look at the phone display. Arthur.

Oh, my God! I pick up.

“Hello? Arthur?”

“Hi, Sylvia. Where are you right now?”

He called me. I'm so happy.

“Where am I? I'm at the kennel on Wayne avenue.”

Fuck! Why did I tell him that!? I stink of dogs and cats. I reek of shit, fur, piss and cedar chips.

“Fine. I'm on Grayson. I can be where you are in 20 minutes.”

“OK. I'll be here.”

“Bye.” and he hangs up.

Holy crap. Don't panic. I just have to do this fast. Thank god I'm wearing my gym clothes and my good ones are in my back pack. I run to the grooming room and strip naked. There in the stainless steel tub where I soaked Saint Bernards I cleaned off with the detachable hose. I used soap from the bathroom and dog shampoo on my hair. Disparate measures.

I dry myself with the cleanest towel I can find, and dress fast. That's when I step outside, and it is so much colder than I thought it would be. I hope my hair is not so damp that it freezes.

I cross my arms and bounce on my heels to keep warm. Behind me in the night cold the dogs begin barking calling to me from their shut cages. I see headlights turn up the driveway, I smile into the low-beams until I see past them and into the driver's seat. Loopy.

Goddammit. Loopy.

He pulls up and parks. It's a luxury SUV. Arthur comes out of the passenger side and leans on the hood.

"Sylvia. We have much to talk about. Hop in."

-DAVE-

The gentle hum of the engine, and the smooth leather interior is just the start. It has pre-set memory chairs, a six-disk CD player with MP3 compatibility, Motion tracking headlights. My first stolen car is a damn Lexus.

“You like the car, Sylvia?” I ask her

“It's OK, I guess.” She replies glancing out the window in a dismissive manner.

Arthur turns around and looks back at her as I take the freeway ramp to the raised interstate.

“So, Sylvia, you never found out anything about Ken.”

She points at me and says “Just that he's a friend of this loser over here.”

“Close.” I say. “I am Ken.”

“You are?”

“When I first met Arthur, I told him that was my name.”

“Right.” Arthur replies. I lower my side of the cabin's temperature from 75 to 72. Duel climate zones included. “You see Ken Loopy Dave, here, was trying to extort \$80 grand out of me. Then, thanks to you, my diminutive little nymph he found out about the ten million I had already saved. The so-called Doomsday fund.”

“How do you usually get home, Sylvia?”

“I catch the late train.” She's still not looking at me, she just stares out the closed window.

“This is a lot better than taking a train, huh?”

“I guess.”

I can't get through to her today. Come on, Sylvia. We're never going to see each other again.

“Well, for my part, because of you Arthur here found out where I live, my real identity, how I steal for a living and my police record.”

“You sold us out to each other.” Arthur chides.

“Arthur,” Sylvia says as a punch the engine up another thousand revs. “I only wanted to help you. I swear if I knew that Loopy and Ken were the same, I'd have told you that.”

The oncoming lights of the traffic whoosh by with repeated slices of rushing wind. The stars and their faint glimmer through the moon roof is silent and still. I can't believe she's still calling me Loopy. Dave; for the love of god. Arthur smiles a bit.

“It's OK, Sylvia. You helped get us together.”

“In one mile, right turn onto exit 22.” Says the car's automated GPS.

“Dave and I are working together now since we can't get rid of each other we're going to pool our resources.”

She gets loud, suddenly. “What resources?! He's a wasted little wretch who snatches purses and digital cameras and computers. He makes enough money to eat and steal.”

“Easy now.” I say sarcastically and sardonically.

“No! It's all true. He's a liar. He never does the right thing. He never tells the truth.”

“I am not a liar.”

“Your name isn't even Loopy. It's not even Ken. You drag me to your church and I get grilled with truth and forgiveness and redemption, and the whole message just goes right through you like wind. Then you take me back to your den of pilfered swag. Hypocrite.”

If the truth sets you free, why does it burn like nothing else? Is that freedom?

“Like you're one to talk with your locker-room-”

“Quit banging on that fucking drum, Loopy. It's getting old.”

I pull up to her apartment building and park the car. I really wanted her to think the car was cool. That's just stupid. Why should I care what she thinks, anyway?”

She looks at Arthur then back at me.

“You don't even know.”

“Oh, don't I? It's no big secret. He knows, I know. You just want to get off on a pile of naked teenage boys. Perverted peeping-tom little weasel. Am I a down and dirty crook? Yeah? Are you a fucking babe in the woods innocent little girl? Hell no.”

“Don't listen to him, Arthur, OK? He'll turn on you and he's nothing but trouble.”

“Fuck this. Are you getting out?” She's getting serious.

“Loopy will only make things worse for you.”

“Be that as it may, Sylvia,” He says “We're stuck with each other. Him and me we are planning to get some very nasty crimes going on. I don't think he's right about you anyway. You're much more innocent than the likes of us. Go out there, Kid. Get some guys, drink some beer. Live a little. Just keep away from us for your sake.”

“Arthur, no.”

“Go on, little girl. Get out of our car, and forget everything about us.”

“Arthur, if you ask me to, I'll stop taking photos. OK? If you want me to I'll give up all that stupid shit. It's all going to be fine. Whatever you want me to do, I want to do it, and I will; but I can't leave you. I only want you, Arthur.”

I roll my eyes.

“Hm?” Arthur replies.

“You're the best, Arthur. You're the only one I see. Your voice is strong, but kind. You have such sweet eyes and everything you do you're so confident. I can't leave. I love you Arthur. I love you with all my heart. Please you have to help me. I love you.”

She is inches from breaking out into tears.

-ARTHUR-

I don't believe this.

"Sylvia, I have none of those feelings for you. None. I mean, just...just...get out of the car."

Her big gray eyes tear up under her blond hair. For a second she tries to build herself up not to cry. This makes her all the more a mess when she does. She throws the door open, and Dave rushes out to help her to the door. She bats him away.

"I don't need your fucking sympathy."

She goes in and slams the apartment door. Ken stays out there a second before getting back to the car.

"That must have made her day." He says buckling up.

"I think it made her year."

"Little cold, don't you think?"

"November is cold. Emotions, they ride high, then come crashing down. Life goes on."

We drive off, then I talk business a bit.

"I'll walk you through the next part. I'll show you a chop-shop. Drive it on in, they'll rip it to pieces and sell it off. You keep the money."

"Where do you come into the picture?"

"You know how to drive stick?"

"No."

"I'll teach you how to drive stick. That's my part of it."

"You know I want in on the doomsday fund."

"I'll figure out what we'll do about that. For now that money is mine, and it stays that way."

"How much can I get for this ride?"

"At a chop shop? If they buy it, 10 to 20 grand."

"What do you mean if they buy it?"

"A Lexus is pretty hot. Parts are harder to move. You want to steal cars? Steal something more commonplace."

I like the idea of Dave and me side by side and him learning to run manual in my car. That's a pretty good set-up.

What the hell am I thinking? He's 100% straight. I'm no better than that stupid blond shrimp.

Everything in this car that doesn't glow with LEDs is black. The leather of the seats and the carpet. This thing is very goth. Maybe I'll get one for myself.

"What do you normally do with what you steal?"

"I move the stuff. Internet auctions, pawn shops; it's a slaughterhouse."

"Isn't that a little risky? Don't you think someone will trace you?"

"Pawn shops don't give a damn, and as for the Internet I'm set up like a legit business. 9-comm retail and antiquities. Headquartered out of Hicksville, New York."

"Dummy corporation?"

"Nobody cares where you send the shit from, just so long as you send it."

He presses down the accelerator. There is a mighty throbbing roar from the engine which next week will be assorted spare parts. He has his eyes only on the road. Only the advancing white lines of the endless blacktop into the night.

Send questions, Comments, thoughts to
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